

SPECIAL COMMENTARY**THE BENEFIT OF WEST NILE VIRUS**
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The scenario related to the West Nile virus's march across the North American Continent does not come without some lessons learned, and in turn hopefully the underlying benefit will be realized.

The losses can be measured in confirmed cases of human infections, the degree of those infections and even the number of fatalities directly related to the disease. We can also draw upon the real life experiences that the disease represents more complications and lingering debilitations than what was first generally described as "flu-like." Another direct measure can be seen in the number of horses that have succumbed to the disease. Additionally, the loss in native bird populations, which are difficult to measure, but from general observation in Southwestern Idaho, these losses have been very significant.

The benefits, from my point of view, are:

1. Renewed awareness that nature's biological forces can have a tremendous effect on human and animal life (over a very large area of the world).
 2. Vector control efforts have the ability to intervene in vectored disease cycles.
 3. Effective vector control can minimize or greatly reduce the impact of vectored diseases.
 4. Effective, and sustainable, vector management requires an integration of pest control techniques.
- The vector management process requires trained and committed personnel to plan and facilitate an effective management program.

For those of you who have not experience an outbreak of WNV in your area, I make the following recommendations:

1. Make a plan (make it simple - lots of guidelines available but pick what will work for you and put the rest on the shelf for reference). Be prepared to adjust to, and address, issues that arise.
 2. Identify and secure the resources that will be needed to work your plan (i.e. train personnel, secure monitoring and application equipment, locate pesticide inventories that you can draw upon, retain contract services and legal counsel - if needed).
 3. Educate the community leaders and regulatory agencies of what may be needed from them. Prepare them to assist you in the implementation of the phases of the plan as the benchmarks are met (if they are not needed to assist, then at least they will be informed, and hopefully they will not hinder or impede the implementation of the plan).
- Prepare to address media issues outside of your operational envelope. While you need to keep the general public informed and your operation open to the "viewing public," the operational staff members need to concentrate on their tasks to produce an effective and safe field operation. In short, retain a public information specialist or identify a primary media contact, and schedule media events to talk to operation and technical staff members when they are not under the stress of an ongoing operation.

Most of you operate under procedures that are similar to the recommendations above, but when the time comes to implement the advanced phases of your plan it becomes painfully clear what part of the preparation was not completed. Dust off the plan, if you have one, consider the recommendations and those things you feel need to be addressed. Then start the process to put the planning and preparation parts in place.

Besides the huge amount of data that was collected as WNV infections emerged and then spread across the continent, the benefit from the WNV situation boils down to you and how you address future vector related issues. You are the person that talks the talk and walks the walk in the vector control world. Learn the lessons from those who have worked their way through an outbreak, review the operational data from outbreak areas, be proactive, inform community leadership and be ready to implement your plan to the fullest.

Happy Trails - Hays

Respectfully Submitted,
Robert (Bob) Hays